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T. B. ALDRICH

Friar Jerome's Beautiful Book Etc.

SELECTED FROM
**CLOTH OF GOLD
AND
FLOWER AND THORN**



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1892

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To

EDMUND CLARENCE STEDMAN.

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FRIAR JEROME'S BEAUTIFUL BOOK, ETC.

FRIAR JEROME'S BEAUTIFUL BOOK.

A. D. 1200.

THE Friar Jerome, for some slight sin
Done in his youth, was struck with woe.
"When I am dead," quoth Friar Jerome,
"Surely, I think my soul will go
Shuddering through the darkened spheres,
Down to eternal fires below !
I shall not dare from that dread place
To lift mine eyes to Jesus' face,
Nor Mary's, as she sits adored
At the feet of Christ the Lord.
Alas ! December's all too brief
For me to hope to wipe away
The memory of my sinful May ! "

And Friar Jerome was full of grief
 That April evening, as he lay
 On the straw pallet in his cell. <
 He scarcely heard the curfew-bell
 Calling the brotherhood to prayer <
 But he arose, for 't was his care
 Nightly to feed the hungry poor <
 That crowded to the Convent door.

His choicest duty it had been :
 But this one night it weighed him down.
 "What work for an immortal soul,
 To feed and clothe some lazy clown !
 Is there no action worth my mood,
 No deed of daring, high and pure,
 That shall, when I am dead, endure,
 A well-spring of perpetual good ?"

And straight he thought of those great
 tomes
 With clamps of gold — the Convent's <
 boast —
 How they endured, while kings and
 realms
 Past into darkness and were lost ;
 How they had stood from age to age,
 Clad in their yellow vellum-mail,

'Gainst which the Paynim's godless rage,
The Vandal's fire, could naught avail :
Though heathen sword-blows fell like
 hail,

Though cities ran with Christian blood,
Imperishable they had stood !
They did not seem like books to him,
But Heroes, Martyrs, Saints — them-
 selves

The things they told of, not mere books
Ranged grimly on the oaken shelves.

To those dim alcoves, far withdrawn,
He turned with measured steps and slow
Trimming his lantern as he went ;
And there, among the shadows, bent
Above one ponderous folio,
With whose miraculous text were blent
Seraphic faces : Angels, crowned
With rings of melting amethyst ;
Mute, patient Martyrs, cruelly bound
To blazing fagots ; here and there,
Some bold, serene Evangelist,
Or Mary in her sunny hair ;
And here and there from out the words
A brilliant tropic bird took flight ;
And through the margins many a vine

Went wandering — roses, red and white,
 Tulip, wind-flower, and columbine
 Blossomed To his believing mind
 These things were real, and the wind,
 Blown through the mullioned window,
 took

Scent from the lilies in the book.

“ Santa Maria ! ” cried Friar Jerome,
 “ Whatever man illumined this,
 Though he were steeped heart-deep in
 sin,
 Was worthy of unending bliss,
 And no doubt hath it ! Ah ! dear Lord,
 Might I so beautify Thy Word !
 What sacristan, the convents through,
 Transcribes with such precision ? who
 Does such initials as I do ?
 Lo ! I will gird me to this work,
 And save me, ere the one chance slips.
 On smooth, clean parchment I 'll engross
 The Prophet's fell Apocalypse ;
 And as I write from day to day,
 Perchance my sins will pass away.”

So Friar Jerome began his Book.
 From break of dawn till curfew-chime

He bent above the lengthening page,
Like some rapt poet o'er his rhyme.
He scarcely paused to tell his beads,
Except at night ; and then he lay
And tost, unrestful, on the straw,
Impatient for the coming day —
Working like one who feels, perchance,
That, ere the longed-for goal be won;
Ere Beauty bare her perfect breast,
Black Death may pluck him from the
sun.

At intervals the busy brook,
Turning the mill-wheel, caught his ear, \times
And through the grating of the cell
He saw the honeysuckles peer,
And knew 't was summer, that the sheep
In fragrant pastures lay asleep, \times
And felt that, somehow, God was near. \times
In his green pulpit on the elm, \times
The robin, abbot of that wood, \vee
Held forth by times ; and Friar Jerome
Listened, and smiled, and understood.

While summer wrapt the blissful land
What joy it was to labor so,
To see the long-tressed Angels grow
Beneath the cunning of his hand,

Vignette and tail-piece subtly wrought !
 And little recked he of the poor
 That missed him at the Convent door ;
 Or, thinking of them, put the thought
 Aside. " I feed the souls of men
 Henceforth, and not their bodies ! " —
 yet

Their sharp, pinched features, now and
 then,
 Stole in between him and his Book,
 And filled him with a vague regret.

Now on that region fell a blight :
 The corn grew cankered in its sheath ;
 And from the verdurous uplands rolled
 A sultry vapor fraught with death —
 A poisonous mist, that, like a pall,
 Hung black and stagnant over all.
 Then came the sickness — the malign,
 Green-spotted terror called the Pest,
 That took the light from loving eyes,
 And made the young bride's gentle
 breast
 A fatal pillow. Ah ! the woe, X
 The crime, the madness that befell !
 In one short night that vale became

More foul than Dante's inmost hell.
Men curst their wives; and mothers left
Their nursing babes alone to die,
And wantoned, singing, through the ~~X~~
streets,
With shameless brow and frenzied eye;
And senseless clowns, not fearing
God —
Such power the spotted fever had —
Razed Cragwood Castle on the hill,
Pillaged the wine-bins, and went mad.
And evermore that dreadful pall
Of mist hung stagnant over all :
By day, a sickly light broke through
The heated fog, on town and field ;
By night, the moon, in anger, turned ~~X~~
Against the earth its mottled shield.

Then from the Convent, two and two,
The Prior chanting at their head,
The monks went forth to shrive the sick,
And give the hungry grave its dead — ~~X~~
Only Jerome, he went not forth,
But hiding in his dusty nook,
“ Let come what will, I must illumine
The last ten pages of my Book ! ”
He drew his stool before the desk,

And sat him down, distraught and wan,
 To paint his daring masterpiece,
 The stately figure of Saint John.
 He sketched the head with pious care,
 Laid in the tint, when, powers of Grace !
 He found a grinning Death's-head there,
 And not the grand Apostle's face !

Then up he rose with one long cry : ~~A~~
 " 'T is Satan's self does this," cried he,
 " Because I shut and barred my heart
 When Thou didst loudest call to me !
 O Lord, Thou know'st the thoughts of
 men,
 Thou know'st that I did yearn to make
 Thy Word more lovely to the eyes
 Of sinful souls, for Christ his sake !
 Nathless, I leave the task undone :
 I give up all to follow Thee —
 Even like him who gave his nets
 To winds and waves by Galilee ! "

Which said, he closed the precious
 Book
 In silence, with a reverent hand ;
 And drawing his cowl about his face ~~X~~
 Went forth into the Stricken Land.

And there was joy in heaven that day —
More joy o'er this forlorn old friar
Than over fifty sinless men
Who never struggled with desire !

What deeds he did in that dark town,
What hearts he soothed with anguish *c*
torn,
What weary ways of woe he trod,
Are written in the Book of God,
And shall be read at Judgment Morn.
The weeks crept on, when, one still day,
God's awful presence filled the sky,
And that black vapor floated by,
And lo ! the sickness past away.
With silvery clang, by thorpe and town,
The bells made merry in their spires : ~~x~~
O God ! to think the Pest is flown !
Men kissed each other on the street,
And music piped to dancing feet
c
The livelong night, by roaring fires ! *c*

Then Friar Jerome, a wasted shape —
For he had taken the Plague at last —
Rose up, and through the happy town,
And through the wintry woodlands, *c*
past

Into the Convent. What a gloom
 Sat brooding in each desolate room !
 What silence in the corridor !
 For of that long, innumerable train .
 Which issued forth a month before
 Scarce twenty had come back again !

Counting his rosary step by step,
 With a forlorn and vacant air,
 Like some unshiven churchyard thing,
 The Friar crawled up the mouldy stair
 To his damp cell, that he might look
 Once more on his belovéd Book.

And there it lay upon the stand,
 Open ! — he had not left it so. X
 He grasped it, with a cry ; for, lo !
 He saw that some angelic hand,
 While he was gone, had finished it !
 There 't was complete, as he had
 planned ;
 There, at the end, stood **Finis**, writ X
 And gilded as no man could do —
 Not even that pious anchoret,
 Bilfrid, the worderful, nor yet
 The miniatore Ethelwold,
 Nor Durham's Bishop, who of old

(England still hoards the priceless leaves)

Did the Four Gospels all in gold.
And Friar Jerome nor spoke nor stirred,
But, with his eyes fixed on that word,
He passed from sin and want and scorn ;
And suddenly the chapel-bells
Rang in the holy Christmas-Morn ! X

In those wild wars which racked the land

Since then, and kingdoms rent in twain,
The Friar's Beautiful Book was lost —
That miracle of hand and brain :
Yet, though its leaves were torn and tost,
The volume was not writ in vain !

SPRING IN NEW ENGLAND.

I.

THE long years come and go,
And the Past,
The sorrowful, splendid Past,
With its glory and its woe,
Seems never to have been.
The bugle's taunting blast
Has died away by Southern ford and
glen :
The mock-bird sings unfrightened in
its dell ;
The ensanguined stream flows pure
again ;
Where once the hissing death-bolt fell,
And all along the artillery's level lines
Leapt flames of hell,
The farmer smiles upon the sprouting
grain,
And tends his vines.
Seems never to have been ?
O sombre days and grand,
How ye crowd back once more,

Seeing our heroes' graves are green
By the Potomac and the Cumberland,
And in the valley of the Shenan-
doah !

II.

Now while the pale arbutus in our
woods
Wakes to faint life beneath the dead
year's leaves,
And the bleak North lets loose its wail-
ing broods
Of winds upon us, and the gray sea
grieves
Along our coast ; while yet the Winter's
hand
Heavily presses on New England's
heart,
And Spring averts the sunshine of her
eyes
Lest some vain cowslip should untimely
start —
While we are housed in this rude sea-
son's gloom,
In this rude land,
Bereft of warmth and bloom,
We know, far off beneath the Southern
skies,

22 SPRING IN NEW ENGLAND.

Where the flush blossoms mock our
drifts of snow
And the lithe vine unfolds its emerald
sheen —
On many a sunny hillside there, we
know
Our heroes' graves are green.

III.

The long years come, but *they*
Come not again !
Through vapors dense and gray
Steals back the May,
But they come not again —
Swept by the battle's fiery breath
Down unknown ways of death.
How can our fancies help but go
Out from this realm of mist and rain,
Out from this realm of sleet and snow,
When the first Southern violets blow ?

IV.

While yet the year is young
Many a garland shall be hung
In our gardens of the dead ;
On obelisk and urn

Shall the lilac's purple burn,
And the wild-rose leaves be shed.
And afar in the woodland ways,
Through the rustic church-yard gate
Matrons and maidens shall pass,
Striplings and white-haired men,
And, spreading aside the grass,
Linger at name and date,
Remembering old, old days !
And the lettering on each stone
Where the mould's green breath has
blown
Tears shall wash clear again !

V.

But far away to the South, in the sultry,
stricken land —
On the banks of silvery streams gurg-
ling among their reeds,
By many a drear morass, where the
long-necked pelican feeds,
By many a dark bayou, and blinding
dune of sand,
By many a cypress swamp where the
cayman seeks its prey,
In many a moss-hung wood, the twi-
light's haunt by day,

24 SPRING IN NEW ENGLAND.

And down where the land's parched lip
drinks at the salt sea-waves,
And the ghostly sails glide by — there
are piteous nameless graves.

Their names no tongue may tell,
Buried there where they fell,
The bravest of our braves !
Never sweetheart, or friend,
Wan pale mother, or bride,
Over these mounds shall bend,
Tenderly putting aside
The unremembering grass !
Never the votive wreath
For the unknown brows beneath,
Never a tear, alas !
How can our fancies help but go
Out from this realm of mist and rain,
Out from this realm of sleet and
snow,
When the first Southern violets blow ?
How must our thought bend over
them,
Blessing the flowers that cover them —
Piteous, nameless graves !

VI.

Ah, but the life they gave
Is not shut in the grave :
The valorous spirits freed
Live in the vital deed !
Marble shall crumble to dust,
Plinth of bronze and of stone,
Carved escutcheon and crest —
Silently, one by one,
The sculptured lilies fall :
Softly the tooth of the rust
Gnaws through the brazen shield :
Broken, and covered with stains,
The crossed stone swords must yield :
Mined by the frost and the drouth,
Smitten by north and south,
Smitten by east and west,
Down comes column and all !
But the great deed remains.

VII.

When we remember how they died —
In dark ravine and on the mountain-side,
In leaguered fort and fire-encircled
town,
Upon the gun-boat's splintered deck,
And where the iron ships went down —

26 SPRING IN NEW ENGLAND.

How their dear lives were spent,
In the crushed and reddened wreck,
By lone lagoons and streams,
In the weary hospital-tent,
In the cockpit's crowded hive --.
How they languished and died
In the black stockades — it seems
Ignoble to be alive !
Tears will well to our eyes,
And the bitter doubt will rise —
But hush ! for the strife is done,
Forgiven are wound and scar ;
The fight was fought and won
Long since, on sea and shore,
And every scattered star
Set in the blue once more :
We are one as before,
With the blot from our scutcheon gone !

VIII.

So let our heroes rest
Upon your sunny breast :
Keep them, O South, our tender hearts
and true.
Keep them, O South, and learn to hold
them dear
From year to year !

SPRING IN NEW ENGLAND. 27

Never forget,
Dying for us, they died for you.
This hallowed dust should knit us closer
yet.

IX.

Hark ! 't is the bluebird's venturesome
strain
High on the old fringed elm at the
gate—
Sweet-voiced, valiant on the sway-
ing bough,
Alert, elate,
Dodging the fitful spits of snow,
New England's poet-laureate
Telling us Spring has come again !

BABY BELL.

I.

HAVE you not heard the poets tell
How came the dainty Baby Bell
Into this world of ours ?
The gates of heaven were left ajar :
With folded hands and dreamy eyes,
Wandering out of Paradise,
She saw this planet, like a star,
 Hung in the glistening depths of
even —
Its bridges, running to and fro,
O'er which the white-winged Angels go,
 Bearing the holy Dead to heaven.
She touched a bridge of flowers — those
 feet,
So light they did not bend the bells
Of the celestial asphodels,
They fell like dew upon the flowers :
Then all the air grew strangely sweet !
And thus came dainty Baby Bell
 Into this world of ours.

II.

She came and brought delicious May.
The swallows built beneath the
eaves ;
Like sunlight, in and out the leaves
The robins went, the livelong day ;
The lily swung its noiseless bell ;
And o'er the porch the trembling
vine
Seemed bursting with its veins of
wine.
How sweetly, softly, twilight fell !
O, earth was full of singing-birds
And opening springtide flowers,
When the dainty Baby Bell
Came to this world of ours !

III.

O Baby, dainty Baby Bell,
How fair she grew from day to day !
What woman-nature filled her eyes,
What poetry within them lay —
Those deep and tender twilight eyes,
So full of meaning, pure and bright
As if she yet stood in the light
Of those oped gates of Paradise.

And so we loved her more and more :
 Ah, never in our hearts before
 Was love so lovely born !
 We felt we had a link between
 This real world and that unseen —
 The land beyond the morn ;
 And for the love of those dear eyes,
 For love of her whom God led forth,
 (The mother's being ceased on earth
 When Baby came from Paradise,) —
 For love of Him who smote our lives,
 And woke the chords of joy and
 pain,
 We said, *Dear Christ!* — our hearts
 bent down
 Like violets after rain.

IV.

And now the orchards, which were white
 And red with blossoms when she
 came,
 Were rich in autumn's mellow prime ;
 The clustered apples burnt like flame,
 The soft-cheeked peaches blushed
 and fell,
 The ivory chestnut burst its shell,
 The grapes hung purpling in the
 grange :

And time wrought just as rich a
change

In little Baby Bell.

Her lissome form more perfect grew,
And in her features we could trace,
In softened curves, her mother's
face.

Her angel-nature ripened too :
We thought her lovely when she came,
But she was holy, saintly now
Around her pale angelic brow
We saw a slender ring of flame !

v.

God's hand had taken away the seal
That held the portals of her speech ;
And oft she said a few strange words
Whose meaning lay beyond our
reach.

She never was a child to us,
We never held her being's key ;
We could not teach her holy things :
She was Christ's self in purity.

VI.

It came upon us by degrees,
We saw its shadow ere it fell, —
The knowledge that our God had sent

His messenger for Baby Bell.
 We shuddered with unlanguaged pain,
 And all our hopes were changed to
 fears,
 And all our thoughts ran into tears
 Like sunshine into rain.
 We cried aloud in our belief,
 “O, smite us gently, gently, God !
 Teach us to bend and kiss the rod,
 And perfect grow through grief.”
 Ah ! how we loved her, God can tell ;
 Her heart was folded deep in ours.
 Our hearts are broken, Baby Bell !

VII.

At last he came, the messenger,
 The messenger from unseen lands :
 And what did dainty Baby Bell ?
 She only crossed her little hands,
 She only looked more meek and fair !
 We parted back her silken hair,
 We wove the roses round her brow,—
 White buds, the summer’s drifted
 snow—
 Wrapt her from head to foot in flow-
 ers
 And thus went dainty Baby Bell
 Out of this world of ours !

THE LADY OF CASTELNORE.

A. D. 1700.

I.

BRÉTAGNE had not her peer. In the Province far or near
There were never such brown tresses, such a faultless hand ;
She had youth, and she had gold, she had jewels all untold,
And many a lover bold wooed the Lady of the Land.

II.

But she, with queenliest grace, bent low her pallid face,
And “Woo me not for Jesus’ sake, fair gentlemen,” she said.
If they woo’d, then — with a frown she would strike their passion down :
She might have wed a crown to the ringlets on her head.

III.

From the dizzy castle-tips, hour by hour
she watched the ships,
Like sheeted phantoms coming and
going evermore,
While the twilight settled down on the
sleepy seaport town,
On the gables peaked and brown, that
had sheltered kings of yore.

IV.

Dusky belts of cedar-wood partly claspt
the widening flood ;
Like a knot of daisies lay the hamlets
on the hill ;
In the hostelry below sparks of light
would come and go,
And faint voices, strangely low, from
the garrulous old mill.

V.

Here the land in grassy swells gently
broke ; there sunk in dells
With mosses green and purple, and
prongs of rock and peat ;

THE LADY OF CASTELNORE. 35

Here, in statue-like repose, an old
wrinkled mountain rose,
With its hoary head in snows, and wild-
roses at its feet.

VI.

And so oft she sat alone in the turret
of gray stone,
And looked across the moorland, so
woful, to the sea,
That there grew a village-cry, how her
cheek did lose its dye,
As a ship, once, sailing by, faded on the
sapphire lea.

VII.

Her few walks led all one way, and all
ended at the gray
And ragged, jagged rocks that fringe
the lonesome beach ;
There she would stand, the Sweet !
with the white surf at her feet,
While above her wheeled the fleet spar-
row-hawk with startling screech.

VIII.

And she ever loved the sea — God's
half-uttered mystery —
With its million lips of shells, its never-
ceasing roar ;
And 't was well that, when she died,
they made her a grave beside
The blue pulses of the tide, by the
towers of Castelnore.

IX.

Now, one chill November morn, many
russet autumns gone,
A strange ship with folded wings lay
dozing off the lea ;
It had lain throughout the night with
its wings of murky white
Folded, after weary flight — the worn
nursling of the sea.

X.

Crowds of peasants flocked the sands ;
there were tears and clasping
hands ;
And a sailor from the ship stalked
through the church-yard gate.

Then amid the grass that crept, fading,
over her who slept,
How he hid his face and wept, crying
Late, alas! too late!

XI.

And they called her cold. God knows.
.... Underneath the winter snows
The invisible hearts of flowers grow
ripe for blossoming!
And the lives that look so cold, if their
stories could be told,
Would seem cast in gentler mould,
would seem full of love and
spring.

MIANTOWONA.

I.

LONG ere the Pale Face
Crossed the Great Water,
Miantowona
Passed, with her beauty,
Into a legend
Pure as a wild-flower
Found in a broken
Ledge by the seaside.

Let us revere them —
These wildwood legends,
Born of the camp-fire.
Let them be handed
Down to our children —
Richest of heirlooms.
No land may claim them :
They are ours only,
Like our grand rivers,
Like our vast prairies,
Like our dead heroes.

II.

IN the pine-forest,
Guarded by shadows,
Lieth the haunted
Pond of the Red Men.
Ringed by the emerald
Mountains, it lies there
Like an untarnished
Buckler of silver,
Dropped in that valley
By the Great Spirit !
Weird are the figures
Traced on its margins —
Vine-work and leaf-work,
Down-drooping fuchsias,
Knots of sword-grasses,
Moonlight and starlight,
Clouds scudding northward.
Sometimes an eagle
Flutters across it ;
Sometimes a single
Star on its bosom
Nestles till morning.

Far in the ages,
Miantowona,

Rose of the Hurons,
Came to these waters.
Where the dank greensward
Slopes to the pebbles,
Miantowona
Sat in her anguish.
Ice to her maidens,
Ice to the chieftains,
Fire to her lover !
Here he had won her,
Here they had parted,
Here could her tears flow.
With unwet eyelash,
Miantowona
Nursed her old father,
Gray-eyed Tawanda,
Oldest of Hurons,
Soothed his complainings,
Smiled when he chid her
Vaguely for nothing —
He was so weak now,
Like a shrunk cedar
White with the hoar-frost.
Sometimes she gently
Linked arms with maidens,
Joined in their dances :
Not with her people,

Not in the wigwam,
Wept for her lover.
Ah ! who was like him ?
Fleet as an arrow,
Strong as a bison,
Lithe as a panther,
Soft as the south-wind,
Who was like Wawah ?
There is one other
Stronger and fleeter,
Bearing no wampum,
Wearing no war-paint,
Ruler of councils,
Chief of the war-path —
Who can gainsay him,
Who can defy him ?
His is the lightning,
His is the whirlwind,
Let us be humble,
We are but ashes —
'T is the Great Spirit !

Ever at nightfall
Miantowona
Strayed from the lodges,
Passed through the shadows

Into the forest :
There by the pond-side
Spread her black tresses
Over her forehead.
Sad is the loon's cry
Heard in the twilight;
Sad is the night-wind,
Moaning and moaning ;
Sadder the stifled
Sob of a widow.

Low on the pebbles
Murmured the water :
Often she fancied
It was young Wawah
Playing the reed-flute.
Sometimes a dry branch
Snapped in the forest :
Then she rose, startled,
Ruddy as sunrise,
Warm for his coming !
But when he came not,
Back through the darkness,
Half broken-hearted,
Miantowona
Went to her people.

When an old oak dies,
First 't is the tree-tops,
Then the low branches,
Then the gaunt stem goes :
So fell Tawanda,
Oldest of Hurons,
Chief of the chieftains.

Miantowona
Wept not, but softly
Closed the sad eyelids ;
With her own fingers
Fastened the deer-skin
Over his shoulders ;
Then laid beside him
Ash-bow and arrows,
Pipe-bowl and wampum,
Dried corn and bear-meat —
All that was needful
On the long journey.
Thus old Tawanda,
Went to the hunting
Grounds of the Red Man.

Then, as the dirges
Rose from the village,
Miantowona

Stole from the mourners,
Stole through the cornfields,
Passed like a phantom
Into the shadows
Through the pine-forest.

One who had watched her —
It was Nahoho,
Loving her vainly —
Saw, as she passed him,
That in her features
Made his stout heart quail.
He could but follow.
Quick were her footsteps,
Light as a snow-flake,
Leaving no traces
On the white clover.

Like a trained runner,
Winner of prizes,
Into the woodlands
Plunged the young chieftain.
Once he abruptly
Halted, and listened ;
Then he sped forward
Faster and faster
Toward the bright water.

Breathless he reached it.
Why did he crouch then,
Stark as a statue?

What did he see there
Could so appall him?
Only a circle
Swiftly expanding,
Fading before him;
But, as he watched it,
Up from the centre,
Slowly, superbly
Rose a Pond-Lily.

One cry of wonder,
Shrill as the loon's call,
Rang through the forest,
Startling the silence,
Startling the mourners
Chanting the death-song.
Forth from the village,
Flocking together
Came all the Hurons —
Striplings and warriors,
Maidens and old men,
Squaws with pappooses.

No word was spoken :
There stood the Hurons
On the dank greensward,
With their swart faces
Bowed in the twilight.
What did they see there ?
Only a Lily
Rocked on the azure
Breast of the water.

Then they turned sadly
Each to the other,
Tenderly murmuring,
“ Miantowona ! ”
Soft as the dew falls
Down through the midnight,
Cleaving the starlight,
Echo repeated,
“ Miantowona ! ”

TITA'S TEARS.

A FANTASY.

A CERTAIN man of Ischia — it is thus
The story runs — one Lydus Claudius,
After a life of threescore years and ten,
Passed suddenly from out the world of
men
Into the world of shadows.

In a vale

Where shoals of spirits against the
moonlight pale
Surged ever upward, in a wan-lit place
Near heaven, he met a Presence face
to face —
A figure like a carving on a spire,
Shrouded in wings and with a fillet of
fire
About the brows — who stayed him
there, and said :
“ This the gods grant to thee, O newly
dead !
Whatever thing on earth thou holdest
dear

Shall, at thy bidding, be transported
here,
Save wife or child, or any living thing."

Then straightway Claudius fell to wondering
What he should wish for. Having
heaven at hand,
His wants were few, as you can under-
stand.

Riches and titles, matters dear to us,
To him, of course, were now super-
fluous :

But Tita, small brown Tita, his young
wife,
A two weeks' bride when he took leave
of life,
What would become of her without his
care ?

Tita, so rich, so thoughtless, and so
fair !

At present crushed with sorrow, to be
sure —

But by and by ? What earthly griefs
endure ?

They pass like joys. A year, three
years at most,

And would she mourn her lord, so
quickly lost ?

With fine, prophetic ear, he heard afar
The tingling of some horrible guitar
Under her balcony. "Such thing could
be,"

Sighed Claudius ; "I would she were
with me,
Safe from all harm." But as that wish
was vain,

He let it drift from out his troubled
brain

(His highly trained austerity was such
That self-denial never cost him much),
And strove to think what object he
might name

Most closely linked with the bereavéd
dame.

Her wedding ring ? — 't would be too
small to wear ;

Perhaps a ringlet of her raven hair ?
If not, her portrait, done in cameo,
Or on a background of pale gold ? But
no,

Such trifles jarred with his severity.
At length he thought : "The thing most
meet for me
Would be that antique flask wherein
my bride

Let fall her heavy tears the night I
died."

(It was a custom of that simple day
To have one's tears sealed up and laid
away,

As everlasting tokens of regret—
They find the bottles in Greek ruins
yet.)

For this he wished, then.

Swifter than a thought
The Presence vanished, and the flask
was brought—

Slender, bell-mouthing, and painted all
around

With jet-black tulips on a saffron
ground;

A tiny jar, of porcelain if you will,
Which twenty tears would rather more
than fill.

With careful fingers Claudius broke the
seal

When, suddenly, a well-known muffled
peal

Of laughter leapt from out the vial's
throat,

And died, as dies the wood-bird's dis-
tant note.

Claudius stared; then, struck with
strangest fears,
Reversed the flask —
Alas, for Tita's tears !

PAMPINA.

LYING by the summer sea
I had a dream of Italy.

Chalky cliffs and miles of sand,
Mossy reefs and salty caves,
Then the sparkling emerald waves,
Faded; and I seemed to stand,
Myself a languid Florentine,
In the heart of that fair land.
And in a garden cool and green,
Boccaccio's own enchanted place,
I met Pampina face to face—
A maid so lovely that to see
Her smile is to know Italy.
Her hair was like a coronet
Upon her Grecian forehead set,
Where one gem glistened sunnily
Like Venice, when first seen at sea.
I saw within her violet eyes
The starlight of Italian skies,
And on her brow and breast and hand
The olive of her native land.

And, knowing how in other times
Her lips were ripe with Tuscan rhymes
Of love and wine and dance, I spread
My mantle by an almond-tree,
And "Here, beneath the rose," I said,
"I'll hear thy Tuscan melody."
I heard a tale that was not told
In those ten dreamy days of old,
When Heaven, for some divine offence,
Smote Florence with the pestilence ;
And in that garden's odorous shade
The dames of the Decameron,
With each a loyal lover, strayed,
To laugh and sing, at sorest need,
To lie in the lilies in the sun
With glint of plume and silver brede.
And while she whispers in my ear,
The pleasant Arno murmurs near,
The dewy, slim chameleons run
Through twenty colors in the sun ;
The breezes blur the fountain's glass,
And wake Æolian melodies,
And scatter from the scented trees
The lemon-blossoms on the grass.

The tale ? I have forgot the tale —
A Lady all for love forlorn,

A rosebud, and a nightingale
That bruised his bosom on the thorn ;
A jar of rubies buried deep,
A glen, a corpse, a child asleep,
A monk, that was no monk at all,
In the moonlight by a castle wall.

Now while the large-eyed Tuscan wove
The twisted thread of her romance —
Which I have lost by grievous chance —
The one dear woman that I love,
Beside me in our sea-side nook,
Closed a white finger in her book,
Half vext that she should read, and
weep

For Petrarch, to a man asleep !
And scorning me, so tame and cold,
She rose, and wandered down the shore,
Her wine-dark drapery, fold in fold,
Imprisoned by an ivory hand ;
And on a ledge of granite, half in sand,
She stood, and looked at Appledore.

And waking, I beheld her there
Sea-dreaming in the moted air,
A siren lithe and debonair,
With wristlets woven of scarlet weeds,

And oblong lucent amber beads
Of sea-kelp shining in her hair.
And as I thought of dreams, and how
The something in us never sleeps,
But laughs, or sings, or moans, or weeps,
She turned — and on her breast and
brow

I saw the tint that seemed not won
From kisses of New England sun ;
I saw on brow and breast and hand
The olive of a sunnier land.
She turned — and, lo ! within her eyes
There lay the starlight of Italian skies.

Most dreams are dark, beyond the range
Of reason ; oft we cannot tell
If they are born of heaven or hell :
But to my soul it seems not strange
That, lying by the summer sea,
With that dark woman watching me,
I slept and dreamed of Italy.

THE GUERDON.

VEDDER! this legend, if it had its due,
Would not be sung by me, but told by you
In colors such as Tintoretto knew.

SOOTHED by the fountain's drowsy mur-
muring —
Or was it by the west-wind's indolent
wing? —
The grim court-poet fell asleep one day
In the lords' chamber, when chance
brought that way
The Princess Margaret with a merry
train
Of damozels and ladies — flippant, vain
Court-butterflies — midst whom fair
Margaret
Swayed like a rathe and slender lily set
In rustling leaves, for all her drapery
Was green and gold, and lovely as could
be.

Midway in hall the fountain rose and
fell,
Filling a listless Naiad's outstretched
shell,

And weaving rainbows in the shifting
light.

Upon the carven friezes, left and right,
Was pictured Pan asleep beside his
reed.

In this place all things seemed asleep,
indeed —

The hook-billed parrot on his pendent
ring,

Sitting high-shouldered, half forgot to
swing ;

The wind scarce stirred the hangings at
the door,

And from the silken arras evermore
Yawned drowsy dwarfs with satyr's face
and hoof.

A forest of gold pillars propped the
roof,

And like one slim gold pillar over-
thrown,

The sunlight through a great stained
window shone

And lay across the body of Alain.

You would have thought, perchance, the
man was slain :

As if the checkered column in its fall

Had caught and crushed him, he lay
dead to all.
The parrot's gray bead eye as good as
said,
Unclosing viciously, "The clown is
dead."
A dragon-fly in narrowing circles neared,
And lit, secure, upon the dead man's
beard,
Then spread its iris vans in quick dis-
may,
And into the blue summer sped away !

Little was his of outward grace to win
The eyes of maids, but white the soul
within.
Misshaped, and hideous to look upon
Was this man, dreaming in the noon-
tide sun,
With sunken eyes and winter-whitened
hair,
And sallow cheeks deep seamed with
thought and care.
And so the laughing ladies of the court,
Coming upon him suddenly, stopped
short,
And shrunk together with a nameless
dread ;

Some, but fear held them, would have turned and fled,
Seeing the uncouth figure lying there.
But Princess Margaret, with her heavy hair
From out its diamond fillet rippling down,
Slipped from the group, and plucking back her gown
With white left hand, stole softly to his side—
The fair court gossips staring, curious-eyed,
Half mockingly. A little while she stood,
Finger on lip; then, with the agile blood Climbing her cheek, and silken lashes wet—
She scarce knew what vague pity or regret
Wet them—she stooped, and for a moment's space
Her golden tresses touched the sleeper's face.
Then she stood straight, as lily on its stem,
But hearing her ladies titter, turned on them

Her great queen's eyes, grown black
with scornful frown —
Great eyes that looked the shallow
women down.

“ Nay, not for love ” — one rosy palm
she laid
Softly against her bosom — “ as I ’m a
maid !

Full well I know what cruel things you
say
Of this and that, but hold your peace to-
day.

I pray you think no evil thing of this.
Nay, not for love’s sake did I give the
kiss,
Not for his beauty who ’s nor fair nor
young,
But for the songs which those mute lips
have sung ! ”

That was a right brave princess, one, I
hold,
Worthy to wear a crown of beaten gold.

THE LEGEND OF ARA-CŒLI.

I.

LOOKING at Fra Gervasio,
Wrinkled and withered and old and
gray,
A dry Franciscan from crown to toe,
You would never imagine, by any chance,
That, in the convent garden one day,
He spun this thread of golden romance.

Romance to me, but to him, indeed,
'T was a matter that did not hold a
doubt ;
A miracle, nothing more nor less.
Did I think it strange that, in our need,
Leaning from Heaven to our distress,
The Virgin brought such things about—
Gave mute things speech, made dead
things move ? —
Mother of Mercy, Lady of Love !
Besides, I might, if I wished, behold
The Bambino's self in his cloth of gold
And silver tissue, lying in state
In the Sacristy. Would the signor
wait ?

62 THE LEGEND OF ARA-CŒLI.

Whoever will go to Rome may see,
In the chapel of the Sacristy
Of Ara-Cœli, the Sainted Child—
Garnished from throat to foot with
 rings
And brooches and precious offerings,
And its little nose kissed quite away
By dying lips. At Epiphany,
If the holy winter day prove mild,
It is shown to the wondering, gaping
 crowd
On the church's steps — held high
 aloft —
While every sinful head is bowed,
And the music plays, and the censers'
 soft
White breath ascends like silent prayer.

Many a beggar kneeling there,
Tattered and hungry, without a home,
Would not envy the Pope of Rome,
If he, the beggar, had half the care
Bestowed on *him* that falls to the share
Of yonder Image — for you must know
It has its minions to come and go,
Its perfumed chamber, remote and still,
Its silken couch, and its jewelled throne,

And a special carriage of its own
To take the air in, when it will.

And though it may neither drink nor
eat,

By a nod to its ghostly seneschal
It could have of the choicest wine and
meat.

Often some princess, brown and tall,
Comes, and unclasping from her arm
The glittering bracelet, leaves it, warm
With her throbbing pulse, at the Baby's
feet.

Ah, he is loved by high and low,
Adored alike by simple and wise.

The people kneel to him in the street.

What a felicitous lot is his —
To lie in the light of ladies' eyes,
Petted and pampered, and never to
know

The want of a dozen *soldi* or so !

And what does he do for all of this ?

What does the little Bambino do ?

It cures the sick, and, in fact, 't is said
Can almost bring life back to the dead.
Who doubts it ? Not Fra Gervasio.

When one falls ill, it is left alone
For a while with one — and the fever's
gone !

64 THE LEGEND OF ARA-CŒLI.

At least, 't was once so ; but to-day
It is never permitted, unattended
By monk or priest, to work its lure
At sick folks' beds — all that was ended
By one poor soul whose feeble clay
Satan tempted and made secure.

It was touching this very point the friar
Told me the legend, that afternoon,
In the cloisteral garden all on fire
With scarlet poppies and golden stalks.
Here and there on the sunny walks,
Startled by some slight sound we made,
A lizard, awaking from its swoon,
Shot like an arrow into the shade.
I can hear the fountain's languorous
tune,
(How it comes back, that hour in June
When just to exist was joy enough !)
I can see the olives, silvery-gray,
The carven masonry rich with stains,
The gothic windows with lead-set panes,
The flag-paved cortile, the convent
grates,
And Fra Gervasio holding his snuff
In a squirrel-like, meditative way
Twixt finger and thumb. But the Leg-
end waits.

II.

IT was long ago (so long ago
That Fra Gervasio did not know
What year of our Lord), there came to
Rome

Across the Campagna's flaming red,
A certain Filippo and his wife —
Peasants, and very newly wed.
In the happy spring and blossom of life,
When the light heart chirrups to lovers
calls,
These two, like a pair of birds, had
come
And built their nest 'gainst the city's
walls.

He, with his scanty garden-plots,
Raised flowers and fruit for the market-
place,
Where she, with her pensile, flower-like
face —
Own sister to her forget-me-nots —
Played merchant: and so they thrived
apace,
In humble content, with humble cares
And modest longings, till, unawares,

66 THE LEGEND OF ARA-CŒLI.

Sorrow crept on them ; for to their nest
Had come no little ones, and at last,
When six or seven summers had past,
Seeing no baby at her breast,
The husband brooded, and then grew
cold ;
Scolded and fretted over this —
Who would tend them when they were
old,
And palsied, maybe, sitting alone,
Hungry, beside the cold hearth-stone ?
Not to have children, like the rest !
It cankered the very heart of bliss.

Then he fell into indolent ways,
Neglecting the garden for days and
days,
Playing at *mora*, drinking wine,
With this and that one — letting the
vine
Run riot and die for want of care,
And the choke-weeds gather ; for it was
spring,
When everything needed nurturing.
But he would drowse for hours in the
sun,
Or sit on the broken step by the shed,

Like a man whose honest toil is done,
Sullen, with never a word to spare,
Or a word that were better all unsaid.

And Nina, so light of thought before,
Singing about the cottage door
In her mountain dialect — sang no more ;
But came and went, sad-faced and shy,
Wishing, at times, that she might die,
Brooding and fretting in her turn.
Often, in passing along the street,
Her basket of flowers poised, peasant-wise,

On a lustrous braided coil of her hair,
She would halt, and her dusky cheek
would burn

Like a poppy, beholding at her feet
Some stray little urchin, dirty and bare.
And sudden tears would spring to her
eyes

That the tiny waif was not her own,
To fondle, and kiss, and teach to pray.
Then she passed onward, making moan.
Sometimes she would stand in the
sunny square,

Like a slim bronze statue of Despair,
Watching the children at their play.

In the broad piazza was a shrine,
 With Our Lady holding on her knee
 A small, nude waxen effigy.
 Nina passed by it every day,
 And morn and even, in rain or shine,
 Repeated an *ave* there. "Divine
 Mother," she'd cry, as she turned away,
 "Sitting in paradise, undefiled,
 O, have pity on my distress!"
 Then glancing back at the rosy Child,
 She would cry to it, in her helplessness,
 "Pray her to send the like to me!"

Now once as she knelt before the saint,
 Lifting her hands in silent pain,
 She paled, and her heavy heart grew
 faint
 At a thought which flashed across her
 brain —
 The blinding thought that, perhaps if
 she
 Had lived in the world's miraculous
 morn,
 God might have chosen *her* to be
 The mother — O heavenly ecstasy! —
 Of the little babe in the manger born!
 She, too, was a peasant girl, like her,

The wife of the lowly carpenter !
Like Joseph's wife, a peasant girl !

Her strange little head was in a whirl
As she rose from her knees to wander
home,

Leaving her basket at the shrine ;
So dazed was she, she scarcely knew
The old familiar streets of Rome,
Nor whither she wished to go, in fine ;
But wandered on, now crept, now flew,
In the gathering twilight, till she came
Breathless, bereft of sense and sight,
To the gloomy Arch of Constantine,
And there they found her, late that
night,

With her cheeks like snow and her lips
like flame !

Many a time from day to day,
She heard, as if in a troubled dream,
Footsteps around her, and some one
saying —

Was it Filippo ? — “ Is she dead ? ”
Then it was some one near her praying,
And she was drifting — drifting away
From saints and martyrs in endless
glory !

70 *THE LEGEND OF ARA-CŒLI.*

She seemed to be floating down a stream,
Yet knew she was lying in her bed.
The fancy held her that she had died,
And this was her soul in purgatory,
Until, one morning, two holy men
From the convent came, and laid at her
side

The Bambino. Blessed Virgin ! then
Nina looked up, and laughed, and wept,
And folded it close to her heart, and
slept.

Slept such a soft, refreshing sleep,
That when she awoke her eyes had
taken

That hyaline lustre, dewy, deep,
Of violets when they first awaken ;
And the half-unravelled, fragile thread
Of life was knitted together again.
But she shrunk with sudden, strange
new pain,

And seemed to droop like a flower, the
day

The Capuchins came, with solemn tread,
To carry the Miracle Child away!

III.

E'RE spring in the heart of pansies
burned,

Or the buttercup had loosed its gold,
Nina was busy as ever of old
With fireside cares ; but was not the
same,

For from the hour when she had turned
To clasp the Image the fathers brought
To her dying-bed, a single thought
Had taken possession of her brain :
A purpose, as steady as the flame
Of a lamp in some cathedral crypt,
Had lighted her on her bed of pain ;
The thirst and the fever, they had slipt
Away like visions, but this had stayed —
To have the Bambino brought again,
To have it, and keep it for her own !
That was the secret dream which made
Life for her now — in the streets, alone,
At night, and morning, and when she
prayed.

How should she wrest it from the hand
Of the jealous Church ? How keep the
Child ?

72 THE LEGEND OF ARA-CŒLI.

Flee with it into some distant land —
Like mother Mary from Herod's ire ?
Ah, well, she knew not ; she only knew
It was written down in the Book of Fate
That she should have her heart's desire,
And very soon now, for of late,
In a dream, the little thing had smiled
Up in her face, with one eye's blue
Peering from underneath her breast,
Which the baby fingers had softly prest
Aside, to look at her ! Holy one !
But that should happen ere all was done.

Lying dark in the woman's mind —
Unknown, like a seed in fallow ground —
Was the germ of a plan, confused and
blind
At first, but which, as the weeks rolled
round,
Reached light, and flowered,—a subtile
flower,
Deadly as nightshade. In that same
hour
She sought the husband and said to him,
With crafty tenderness in her eyes
And treacherous archings of her brows,
“ Filippo, mio, thou lov'st me well ?

Truly? Then get thee to the house
Of the long-haired Jew Ben Raphaim—
Seller of curious tapestries,
(Ah, he hath everything to sell!)
The cunning carver of images—
And bid him to carve thee to the life
A *bambinetto* like that they gave
In my arms, to hold me from the grave
When the fever pierced me like a knife.
Perhaps, if we set the image there
By the Cross, the saints would hear the
prayer
Which in all these years they have not
heard."

Then the husband went, without a word,
To the crowded Ghetto; for since the
days
Of Nina's illness, the man had been
A tender husband—with lover's ways
Striving, as best he might, to wean
The wife from her sadness, and to
bring
Back to the home whence it had fled
The happiness of that laughing spring
When they, like a pair of birds, had
wed.

74 THE LEGEND OF ARA-CŒLI.

The image! It was a woman's whim—
They were full of whims. But what to
him

Were a dozen pieces of silver spent,
If it made her happy? And so he went
To the house of the Jew Ben Raphaim.
And the carver heard, and bowed, and
smiled,

And fell to work as if he had known
The thought that lay in the woman's
brain,

And somehow taken it for his own:
For even before the month was flown
He had carved a figure so like the Child
Of Ara-Cœli, you'd not have told,
Had both been decked with jewel and
chain

And dressed alike in a dress of gold,
Which was the true one of the twain.

When Nina beheld it first, her heart
Stood still with wonder. The skilful Jew
Had given the eyes the tender blue,
And the cheeks the delicate olive hue,
And the form almost the curve and line
Of the Image the good Apostle made
Immortal with his miraculous art,

What time the sculptor¹ dreamed in the shade
Under the skies of Palestine.
The bright new coins that clinked in the palm
Of the carver in wood were blurred and dim
Compared with the eyes that looked at him
From the low sweet brows, so seeming calm;
Then he went his way, and her joy broke free,
And Filippo smiled to hear Nina sing
In the old, old fashion — carolling
Like a very thrush, with many a trill
And long-drawn, flute-like, honeyed note,
Till the birds in the farthest mulberry,
Each outstretching its amber bill,
Answered her with melodious throat.

Thus sped two days ; but on the third

¹ According to the monastic legend, the *Santissimo Bambino* was carved by a pilgrim, out of a tree which grew on the Mount of Olives, and painted by St. Luke while the pilgrim was sleeping over his work.

76 *THE LEGEND OF ARA-CŒLI.*

Her singing ceased, and there came a
change
As of death on Nina; her talk grew
strange,
Then she sunk in a trance, nor spoke
nor stirred ;
And the husband, wringing his hands,
dismayed,
Watched by the bed ; but she breathed
no word
That night, nor until the morning broke,
When she roused from the spell, and
feeble laid
Her hand on Filippo's arm, and spoke :
“ Quickly, Filippo ! get thee gone
To the holy fathers, and beg them send
The Bambino hither ” — her cheeks
were wan
And her eyes like coals — “ O, go, my
friend,
Or all is said ! ” Through the morn-
ing's gray
Filippo hurried, like one distraught,
To the monks, and told his tale ; and
they,
Straight after matins, came and brought
The Miracle Child, and went their way.

Once more in her arms was the Infant
laid,
After these weary months, once more !
Yet the woman seemed like a thing of
stone
While the dark-robed fathers knelt and
prayed ;
But the instant the holy friars were gone
She arose, and took the broidered
gown
From the Baby Christ, and the yellow
crown
And the votive brooches and rings it
wore,
Till the little figure, so gay before
In its princely apparel, stood as bare
As your ungloved hand. With tender-
est care,
At her feet, 'twixt blanket and counter-
pane,
She hid the Babe; and then, reaching
down
To the coffer wherein the thing had lain,
Drew forth Ben Raphaim's manikin
In haste, and dressed it in robe and
crown,
With lace and bawble and diamond-pin.

This finished, she turned to stone again,
And lay as one would have thought
quite dead,

If it had not been for a spot of red
Upon either cheek. At the close of day
The Capuchins came, with solemn tread,
And carried the false bambino away !

Over the vast Campagna's plain,
At sunset, a wind began to blow
(From the Apennines it came, they say),
Softly at first, and then to grow —
As the twilight gathered and hurried
by —

To a gale, with sudden tumultuous rain
And thunder muttering far away.

When the night was come, from the
blackened sky

The spear-tongued lightning slipped
like a snake

And the great clouds clashed, and
seemed to shake

The earth to its centre. Then swept
down

Such a storm as was never seen in
Rome

By any one living in that day.

Not a soul dared venture from his home,

THE LEGEND OF ARA-CŒLI. 79

Not a soul in all the crowded town.
Dumb beasts dropped dead, with terror,
 in stall;
Great chimney-stacks were overthrown,
And about the streets the tiles were
 blown

Like leaves in autumn. A fearful night,
With ominous voices in the air !
Indeed, it seemed like the end of all.
In the convent, the monks for very
 fright

Went not to bed, but each in his cell
Counted his beads by the taper's light,
Quaking to hear the dreadful sounds,
And shrivelling in the lightning's glare.
It appeared as if the rivers of Hell
Had risen, and overleaped their bounds.

In the midst of this, at the convent door,
Above the tempest's raving and roar
Came a sudden knocking ! Mother of
 Grace,
What desperate wretch was forced to
 face
Such a night as that was out-of-doors ?
Across the echoless, stony floors
Into the windy corridors

80 THE LEGEND OF ARA-CŒLI.

The monks came flocking, and down
the stair,
Silently, glancing each at each,
As if they had lost the power of speech.
Yes — it was some one knocking there !
And then — strange thing ! — untouched
by a soul
The bell of the convent 'gan to toll !
It curdled the blood beneath their hair.

Reaching the court, the brothers stood
Huddled together, pallid and mute,
By the massive door of iron-clamped
wood,
Till one old monk, more resolute
Than the others — a man of pious
will —
Stepped forth, and letting his lantern
rest
On the pavement, crouched upon his
breast
And peeped through a chink there was
between
The cedar door and the sunken sill.
At the instant a flash of lightning came,
Seeming to wrap the world in flame.
He gave but a glance, and straight
. arose

THE LEGEND OF ARA-CŒLI. 83

With his face like a corpse's. What
had he seen?
Two dripping, little pink-white toes!
Then, like a man gone suddenly wild,
He tugged at the bolts, flung down the
chain,
And there, in the night and wind and
rain—
Shivering, piteous, and forlorn,
And naked as ever it was born—
On the threshold stood the SAINTED
CHILD!

“Since then,” said Fra Gervasio,
“We have never let the Bambino go
Unwatched—no, not by a prince’s bed.
Ah, signor, it made a dreadful stir.”
“And the woman—Nina—what of
her?
Had she no story?” He bowed his
head,
And knitting his meagre fingers, so—
“In that night of wind and wrath,” said
he,
“There was wrought in Rome a mys-
tery.
What know I, signor? They found her
dead!” 6

THE PIAZZA OF ST. MARK AT MIDNIGHT.

HUSHED is the music, hushed the hum
of voices;

Gone is the crowd of dusky promena-
ders —

Slender-waisted, almond-eyed Venetians,
Princes and paupers. Not a single foot-
fall

Sounds in the arches of the Procuratie.
One after one, like sparks in cindered
paper,

Faded the lights out in the goldsmiths'
windows.

Drenched with the moonlight lies the
still Piazza.

Fair as the palace builded for Aladdin,
Yonder St. Mark uplifts its sculptured
splendor —

Intricate fretwork, Byzantine mosaic,
Color on color, column upon column,
Barbaric, wonderful, a thing to kneel to !

Over the portal stand the four gilt horses,
Gilt hoof in air, and wide distended nostril,
Fiery, untamed, as in the days of Nero.
Skyward, a cloud of domes and spires
and crosses ;
Earthward, black shadows flung from
jutting stone-work.
High over all the slender Campanile
Quivers, and seems a falling shaft of
silver !

Hushed is the music, hushed the hum
of voices.
From coigne and cornice and fantastic
gargoyle,
At intervals the moan of dove or pigeon,
Fairly faint, floats off into the moon-light.
This, and the murmur of the Adriatic,
Lazily restless, lapping the mossed marble,
Staircase or buttress, scarcely break the
stillness.
Deeper each moment seems to grow the
silence,

84 ST. MARK AT MIDNIGHT.

Denser the moonlight in the still Piazza.
Hark ! on the Tower above the ancient
gateway,
The twin bronze Vulcans, with their pon-
derous hammers,
Hammer the midnight on their brazen
bell there !

A PRELUDE.

HASSAN BEN ABDUL at the Ivory Gate
Of Bagdad sat and chattered in the sun,
Like any magpie chattered to himself
And four lank, swarthy Arab boys that
 stopt
A gambling game with peach-pits, and
 drew near.
Then Iman Khan, the friend of thirsty
 souls,
The seller of pure water, ceased his cry,
And placed his water-skins against the
 gate—
They looked so like him, with their sal-
 low cheeks
Puffed out like Imân's. Then a eunuch
 came
And swung a pack of sweetmeats from
 his head,
And stood — a hideous pagan cut in jet.
And then a Jew, whose sandal-straps
 were red
With desert-dust, limped, cringing, to
 the crowd —

He, too, would listen; and close after
him
A jeweller that glittered like his shop.
Then two blind mendicants, who wished
to go
Six diverse ways at once, came stum-
bling by,
But hearing Hassan chatter, sat them
down.
And if the Khaleef had been riding near,
He would have paused to listen like the
rest,
For Hassan's fame was ripe in all the
East.
From white-walled Cairo to far Ispahan,
From Mecca to Damascus, he was
known,
Hassan, the Arab with the Singing
Heart.
His songs were sung by boatmen on the
Nile,
By Beddowee maidens, and in Tartar
camps,
While all men loved him as they loved
their eyes;
And when he spake, the wisest, next to
him,

Was he who listened. And thus Has-
san sung.

— And I, a stranger, lingering in Bag-
dad,

Half English and half Arab, by my
beard !

Caught at the gilded epic as it grew,
And for my Christian brothers wrote it
down.

THE METEMPSYCHOSIS.

ABOVE the petty passions of the crowd
I stand in frozen marble like a god,
Inviolate, and ancient as the moon.
The thing I am, and not the thing
 Man is,
Fills my deep dreaming. Let him moan
 and die ;
For he is dust that shall be laid again :
I know my own creation was divine.
Strewn on the breezy continents I see
The veinéd shells and burnished scales
 which once
Enclosed my being — husks that had
 their use ;
I brood on all the shapes I must attain
Before I reach the Perfect, which is God,
And dream my dream, and let the rab-
 ble go ;
For I am of the mountains and the sea,
The deserts, and the caverns in the earth,
The catacombs and fragments of old
 worlds.

I was a spirit on the mountain-tops,
A perfume in the valleys, a simoom
On arid deserts, a nomadic wind
Roaming the universe, a tireless Voice.
I was ere Romulus and Remus were ;
I was ere Nineveh and Babylon ;
I was, and am, and evermore shall be,
Progressing, never reaching to the end.

A hundred years I trembled in the
grass,
The delicate trefoil that muffled warm
A slope on Ida ; for a hundred years
Moved in the purple gyre of those dark
flowers
The Grecian women strew upon the
dead.
Under the earth, in fragrant glooms, I
dwelt ;
Then in the veins and sinews of a pine
On a lone isle, where, from the Cyclades,
A mighty wind, like a leviathan,
Plowed through the brine, and from
those solitudes
Sent Silence, frightened. To and fro I
swayed,
Drawing the sunshine from the stooping
clouds.

Suns came and went, and many a mystic moon,

Orbing and waning, and fierce meteors,
Leaving their lurid ghosts to haunt the night.

I heard loud voices by the sounding shore,

The stormy sea-gods, and from fluted conchs

Wild music, and strange shadows floated by,

Some moaning and some singing. So the years

Clustered about me, till the hand of God
Let down the lightning from a sultry sky,

Splintered the pine and split the iron rock ;

And from my odorous prison-house a bird,

I in its bosom, darted ; so we fled,
Turning the brittle edge of one high wave,

Island and tree and sea-gods left behind !

Free as the air from zone to zone I flew,

Far from the tumult to the quiet gates
Of daybreak; and beneath me I beheld
Vineyards, and rivers that like silver
 threads
Ran through the green and gold of past-
ure-lands,
And here and there a hamlet, a white
 rose,
And here and there a city, whose slim
 spires
And palace-roofs and swollen domes up-
 rose
Like scintillant stalagmites in the sun ;
I saw huge navies battling with a storm
By ragged reefs along the desolate
 coasts,
And lazy merchantmen, that crawled, like
 flies,
Over the blue enamel of the sea
To India or the icy Labradors.
 A century was as a single day.
What is a day to an immortal soul ?
A breath, no more. And yet I hold one
 hour
Beyond all price — that hour when from
 the sky
I circled near and nearer to the earth,

Nearer and nearer, till I brushed my
wings
Against the pointed chestnuts, where a
stream,
That foamed and chattered over pebbly
shoals,
Fled through the briony, and with a
shout
Leapt headlong down a precipice ; and
there,
Gathering wild-flowers in the cool ravine,
Wandered a woman more divinely
shaped
Than any of the creatures of the air,
Or river-goddesses, or restless shades
Of noble matrons marvellous in their time
For beauty and great suffering ; and I
sung,
I charmed her thought, I gave her
dreams, and then
Down from the dewy atmosphere I stole
And nestled in her bosom. There I slept
From moon to moon, while in her eyes a
thought
Grew sweet and sweeter, deepening like
the dawn —
A mystical forewarning ! When the
stream,

Breaking through leafless brambles and
dead leaves,
Piped shriller treble, and from chestnut
boughs
The fruit dropt noiseless through the au-
tumn night,
I gave a quick, low cry, as infants do :
We weep when we are born, not when
we die !
So was it destined ; and thus came I
here,
To walk the earth and wear the form of
Man,
To suffer bravely as becomes my state,
One step, one grade, one cycle nearer
God.
And knowing these things, can I stoop
to fret,
And lie, and haggle in the market-place,
Give dross for dross, or everything for
naught ?
No ! let me sit above the crowd, and
sing,
Waiting with hope for that miraculous
change
Which seems like sleep ; and though I
waiting starve,

94 THE METEMPSYCHOSIS.

I cannot kiss the idols that are set
By every gate, in every street and park ;
I cannot fawn, I cannot soil my soul ;
For I am of the mountains and the sea,
The deserts, and the caverns in the
earth,
The catacombs and fragments of old
worlds.

